

like this, and I am open to a conversation with anyone who shares my desire to take effective action to prevent another one of these tragedies. There is one proposal that has already been introduced that has won bipartisan support and has brought together advocates from all sides. It is really a unique piece of legislation because there are not many times that I can think of where people who are strong Second Amendment advocates and people who believe there ought to be more controls imposed on guns can come together to find consensus, to find common ground, but we have on a bill called the Fix NICS Act, which I introduced to strengthen the background check system.

It may take a long time to answer all the questions raised by the tragedy in Parkland, but one step we can take right now is to pass the Fix NICS bill. This bill has the unique quality of causing the junior Senator from Connecticut and me to reintroduce this bill. We couldn't be more ideologically different. He is a Democrat and I am a Republican, but we have come together on a bill that does enjoy broad bipartisan support and that, I believe, will save lives.

This bill was introduced in the wake of the shooting last fall in the small community near San Antonio called Sutherland Springs, TX. As we will recall, a deranged gunman with a criminal record and a history of violence and mental illness opened fire during a Sunday morning church service, killing 26 people and wounding 20 more. To add to the tragedy that had already occurred, this murderer's criminal conviction records were never uploaded to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System. When he went to purchase firearms, he lied about his record, and there was nothing in the criminal background check system to show that he lied and thus deny him the opportunity to purchase weapons. This failure to enforce our background check law allowed this shooter to walk into a gun store, pass a background check, and illegally purchase a firearm.

This bipartisan legislation would tighten the National Instant Background Check System. It is supported by people all across the political spectrum. It is even cosponsored by the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, and is supported by Everytown for Gun Safety. It has brought together all sides in the gun debate—leaders on the Republican side and Democratic side alike.

Under current law, mentally ill individuals and persons convicted of violent crimes are prohibited by current law from purchasing or possessing firearms. This is to make sure that these laws are enforced and that criminal history information is uploaded into the NICS Federal database by State and Federal authorities.

For years, our colleagues across the aisle have said that they want reform

that would help stem the tide of gun violence perpetrated by dangerous criminals. Well, this is their chance. This is our chance. It is our chance to show the Nation that we refuse to accept shootings in schools and churches as the new normal, and we can do that. We can start doing that by passing Fix NICS this week.

Senator SCHUMER, the minority leader, said yesterday that he wants to wait, even though he is a cosponsor of the Fix NICS bill. He is a cosponsor of the bill, but he says that he wants to wait. He wants to wait and debate other ideas he knows are controversial and can't pass. Of course, that is his right as a Senator, but as I said earlier, if our attitude is "I want everything on my list or nothing," we are going to end up with nothing.

I, for one, am not willing to go home and look my constituents in the face and say that we had an opportunity to pass legislation, the Fix NICS bill, which will save lives in the future and will make sure that existing laws are enforced. I will not be able to go home and tell them, in good faith, that we have done everything we can in our power to help save lives. We can do that by passing bipartisan legislation that could pass today if it were put on the floor and voted on by a supermajority of the Senate.

I implore our Democratic colleagues to change course. Let's do the art of the possible. That is what politics is, the art of the possible. Let's do what we can immediately to pass Fix NICS and build from there. I am willing to work with them. The President is willing to work with them on things like bump stocks and the mental health failure, trying to make sure that our schools are safer and to make sure that social media platforms report threats of violence to law enforcement officials so they can be followed up on.

There are a lot of other things we can do, but the one thing we can do this week before we go home is to pass the Fix NICS bill and to send it to the House and have the President sign it into law. It will save lives.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the Senate will soon vote to confirm another fine candidate to serve on the Federal bench.

Yesterday afternoon, we voted to advance the nomination of Judge Elizabeth Branch for the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals. Judge Branch has sat on the Georgia Court of Appeals since 2012. This follows a fine career that spanned both private practice and public service.

Judge Branch has previously answered the call to serve at the Department of Homeland Security, where she worked as associate general counsel, and then at the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. Her record and qualifications are well known.

Our colleagues on the Judiciary Committee reported her nomination favorably by an overwhelming vote. Confirming this worthy nominee will be a further credit to the outstanding work of Chairman GRASSLEY and the members of the committee.

I encourage all my colleagues to join me in voting to confirm Elizabeth Branch today. Let's continue to fulfill our constitutional responsibility and confirm the President's outstanding judicial nominees.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 387.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of William Northey, of Iowa, to be Under Secretary of Agriculture for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Northey nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Utah.

REMEMBERING FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, 200 years ago this month, a man was born into slavery in a cabin not far from here in

Maryland. The child knew his mother only briefly; they were cruelly separated when he was young. He knew his father only by the rumors. He didn't even know the exact day of his birth. Yes, even his birthday—for many of us, that foundational aspect of identity—was denied him by the cruel master of slavery.

This slave was whipped and beaten. His days were filled with toil. His nights were filled with restless turning on a packed dirt floor. But that is not where the story ends—no, it is only the beginning of the incredible life of Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist, orator, and one of the greatest Americans ever to live. As Douglass would later write in his memoirs, “You have seen how a man was made a slave. You shall see how a slave was made a man.”

For all its terrible might—its bloodhounds and its implements of torture—slavery was not built to withstand Frederick Douglass, just as it was not built to withstand the universal desire for freedom that lies within the heart of man.

Douglass knew that the first step to freedom was education, so he taught himself to read in secrecy because slaves were punished for learning to read. Around the time he was 12, he got hold of an old textbook called “The Columbian Orator.” Little did Douglass know that around that same time, the same textbook was being studied on the Illinois prairie by a young man named Abraham Lincoln. In that textbook, Douglass found speeches by George Washington and Benjamin Franklin—men who revolted against tyranny to claim their liberty. In that book, he also found a fictional dialogue between a slave and his master where the master brought forward “the whole argument in behalf of slavery . . . all of which was disposed of by the slave.” Douglass wrote: This exchange “gave tongue to interesting thoughts of [his] soul.” It kindled his burning conviction that slavery was wrong and he must escape it. From that moment on, Douglass was a grave threat to the very institution of slavery itself. He was free in his own mind.

Douglass’ journey “from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom” would go through many dramatic twists and turns before its conclusion. When a notorious slave breaker tried to beat him for disobeying orders, Douglass wrestled him into submission. He insisted on being treated as a man, and from that day forward, he was never whipped again.

Douglass’ first attempt at escape was a failure, thwarted at the last minute by a betrayal of confidence. He did not fail a second time. In 1838, traveling in disguise under an assumed identity, Douglass took a steamboat north to the blessedness of freedom. At this point in the story, you might expect Douglass to fade from history, to enjoy a modest and tranquil life with his wife and his children. But no—the former slave, who taught himself to read

through the words of Cicero and Washington, went on to be history’s most eloquent witness against slavery. He denounced the bloody institution in 1,000 speeches and from the pages of his own abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, and he denounced slavery firmly from inside the American tradition.

Like many radical abolitionists, at times Frederick Douglass was profoundly ambivalent about his own country. Indeed, there was a time in his early adulthood when he affirmatively hated the United States, preferring disunion to union with slaveholders. But Frederick Douglass later came to a different conclusion about America. When he read the Nation’s founding documents, he did not find codified defenses of slavery; to the contrary, he found that the compromises the Founders had made to slavery were meant to undermine that institution over time, not to sustain it. What Douglass found in the Founders was quite different from what he had expected to find. He later said: Their message “is ‘We the people’; not we the white people, not even we the citizens, not we the privileged class, not we the high, not we the low, but we the people.”

Douglass was an activist, yes, a militant, yes, who led recruiting drives for Black soldiers during the Civil War. But for all of his righteous anger, he did not want to cast aside the principles of his country. Douglass knew that the most powerful antidote to injustice was found within the American tradition, with its insistence on natural rights for all men.

Douglass wrote:

From the first, I saw no chance of bettering the condition of the freedman until he should cease to be merely a freedman and should become a citizen. . . . The liberties of the American people [are] dependent upon the ballot-box, the jury-box, and the cartridge-box; that without these no class of people could live and flourish in this country.

Frederick Douglass has many lessons to teach us if we are willing to listen. I would like to highlight just one more, which I think is especially relevant to us today.

At the end of his famous autobiography, Frederick Douglass contrasted two societies: the slaveholder society he was born into and the northern society where he was reborn in freedom.

The slave society he described was built on force and fraud. Its religion had been perverted to serve earthly idols. Its families were torn apart at the auction block. Its workers toiled to no reward. This society had been poisoned by its rejection of the American creed, by its insistence that all men are not created equal. Indeed, it had become an authoritarian society that policed movement, association, even intimacy. And for what? To protect a hideous falsehood.

The free society Douglass described was different. Here, a man could hold an honest job, and he worked because his work was rewarded, not because he

feared punishment. Here, a runaway slave could make a name for himself, rising to a position of esteem in his community through his service. Here, a family could put down roots and flourish.

Those are two very different societies, guided by very different beliefs. One is a weak community hiding behind a show of strength. The other is a strong and free community with absolutely nothing to hide.

Today we are blessedly free from the institution of slavery, but our communities have their own problems. The American family is in crisis. Our prisons are full, and our pews are empty. Heroin and opioids enslave millions. Many more are killed before they even get the chance to live.

Yes, we have our own battles to fight. In too many ways, we have fallen short of the high principles upon which our Nation was built. That ultimately is why the legacy of Frederick Douglass is so very important. He implored his generation to heal itself of its greatest disease. He calls upon us to do the same.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. YOUNG). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXII, all postcloture time on the Branch nomination expire at 4 p.m. today and the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate. Finally, if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECESS

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:18 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). The Senator from Ohio.

HONORING OFFICERS ANTHONY MORELLI AND ERIC JOERING

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I would like to talk today about two